

Hispanics tired of being shortchanged by schools

Dallas Morning News 10-9-01

Jesse Diaz has been described by some as a man without a purpose. Why? Because at a recent Dallas school board meeting, the president of the Pleasant Grove chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens became disruptive while expressing his strong opposition to a redistricting map.

After Mr. Diaz's protest, the school board postponed its meeting. But the following Monday, a majority of the school trustees went ahead and accepted the controversial map, which would leave the school system's nine voting districts essentially the same and deny Hispanics a third district with a majority.

The vote sent a clear message to Dallas' Hispanic community. Not only will Hispanic community leaders need to engage more Hispanics in the political process, they

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also will have to battle incumbents who are reluctant to give up their political base in a school district where the Hispanic enrollment is 54 percent.

Unfortunately, some school trustees, rather than embracing the new demographic reality, appear ready to resolve the school system's redistricting in court.

To Mr. Diaz and other members of the Hispanic community, the

time has come to challenge the fundamental notion that non-Hispanics are better equipped to decide the educational future of their growing community. Indeed, while the purpose of a disruptive meeting is being questioned, what purpose is served by:

- A Hispanic dropout rate that continues to exceed 50 percent in the Dallas school system?

- A shortage of bilingual education teachers that continues despite their growing need?

- A compensation and benefit system that regards teachers as second-class citizens?

- A teaching and nonteaching workforce that is predominantly non-Hispanic?

- A purchasing process that awards only 1 percent of its contracts to Hispanic-owned businesses?

Had the school board been ef-

fective in addressing those issues, perhaps Hispanic community leaders would be less passionate about the need for redistricting changes. But the sad truth is that the current school trustees, like others before them, have been largely ineffective in reversing those disturbing trends.

To many Hispanics, it is time to change the formula that determines the educational and economic opportunities available to their children.

Not only is the Hispanic community growing in Dallas, but Hispanic consumers and business owners are playing an increasingly important role in the area's economy. Indeed, without significant Hispanic support, it seems doubtful that the school district's much needed bond program will pass next year.

Of course, given the grim pic-

ture of how the school district's education and business practices have shortchanged Hispanics, it is questionable whether even a \$1 billion bond program would result in any significant benefits among the tens of thousands of Hispanic children who attend the public schools.

Political incumbents like the Dallas school trustees need to come to grips with the reality that their days are numbered and that, more important, Hispanics have become impatient with the diplomatic route to effect political change. For when it comes to the welfare of their children, the issue becomes a very personal one for Dallas Hispanics.

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